



Eleanor, or, The Rejection of the Progress of Love

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A novel about a woman writing a novel about a woman who writes — *The Rejection of the Progress of Love* is a sexy, earthy, bracingly intelligent examination of the vicissitudes of grief, ambition, aging, information overload, compassion fatigue, and a data-centric understanding of self; the relative merits of giving up or giving in; the seductive myth of progress; and the condition of being a thinking and feeling (gendered, raced) inhabitant of an unthinkable, numbing world. From Brooklyn to Madison to Ethiopia, Eleanor's slow trek toward a kind of autonomy after her laptop (and her data) are stolen, and the narrator's struggle for authority as she wrestles with her novel and a very famous critic's opinion of it, form a series of intersections of experience, exposure, and self-knowledge, occurring on axes of both will and happenstance: not just the backdrop but the material of the work at hand.

Eleanor, or, The Rejection of the Progress of Love Details

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Author : Anna Moschovakis

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In an experimental fashion that is reminiscent of her own poetic work, Moschovakis weaves together the story of Eleanor while also telling a semi-autobiographic tale of how she arrived at Eleanor the character through her own engagement with an Eleanor in her life. Though at times this process seems contrived and overdone, Moschovakis' does ultimately do a good job weaving these two together intricately. Admittedly, though, this makes reading the book more of a challenge for the readers - having to constantly be on guard, sometimes paragraph to paragraph, about who the writing is discussing at the time.

Nonetheless, the book itself does a nice job discussing the cynicism of life and love and does it in a way that is, fortunately, not too on the nose. This leaves the reader with a feeling of having been emotionally moved by an encounter with the book but without any explicable reason as to why. The book itself is far from quotable - and unlike most books on this topic won't have many paragraphs that leave you weeping or self-reflective. But this book does take you to the edge, to the precipice of cynicism and forces you to think about your own self in retro-spect and as such has the power of a book with twice the emotional heft.

Stu says

This is a novel about writing a novel, the narrative voice alternating between first- and third-person, between Eleanor (an author) and the titular character of Eleanor's work-in-progress, a book titled *Eleanor, or, The Rejection of the Progress of Love*.

Get it?

Unfortunately, that narrative framework -- far less clever than it thinks it is, by the way -- is about all this work has to offer. Yes, there are meditations about the Self in the age of Big Data, about revision as both an act of destruction and creation. But plenty of other texts, from novels to essays, explore those same heady concepts, and *Eleanor...* doesn't manage to unveil any heretofore hidden insights, at least from my vantage point. Considering the novel's tepidly competent prose and meandering plot, all this adds up to a lackluster and unsatisfying reading experience.

2 laptops out of 5

Yonit says

An author named Eleanor writes a book about a person named Eleanor. Started out really well and then I got so confused.

Adam says

Easily one of the best books I've read in 2018. An existential journey that subverts all the tacky "Eat Pray Love" tropes by exploring identity and reality in the online world.

Jacob Wren says

Anna Moschovakis writes:

At this point, Eleanor's thinking became unfamiliar. Had she not been aware of just how familiar her thinking was to her in general, how expected it had become, even in its extremes, in its total enthusiasm and its total skepticism, its most rational gestures and its most impulsive ones? All of it now seemed dull and pathetic, as if thought were a giant mountain and she had spent her life so far considering one side of it only, attempting to scale it, duly scraping her hands and knees, her sights set on the mountains unattainable peak, without it ever once occurring to her - how stupid she'd been! - to relinquish her frontal perspective, to let the mountain become unrecognizable. As if it had never occurred to her to walk to the other side.
